

Introduction

We are in a golden age for tabletop games. (In this book we use the term “tabletop game” to include both board and card games.) There are thousands of new games published each year, and more and more people are participating in the hobby. Television shows like *Hollywood Game Night*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and even *Saturday Night Live* prominently feature tabletop games. The movie *Game Night* grossed more than \$117.6 million and *Battleship* over \$303 million. And new games like *Catan*, *Codenames*, *Pandemic*, *Cards against Humanity*, and *Wingspan* have broken through into wide public awareness and popularity.

With that popularity, more people have gotten the design bug, and worked on their own creations. Game design is a fantastic outlet for creativity, as it comes at the intersection of many disciplines – math, psychology, art, and graphic design just to name a few. And like engineering projects, the designer is subject to constraints that make the development process incredibly challenging. Designers need to balance rules complexity, play time, component count, product cost, and more. It is a pursuit that can be an incredibly satisfying career or hobby.

Another factor in the rise of tabletop games is Kickstarter. In 2019, tabletop games raised over \$170 million, a 7% increase over 2018, and represented over 30% of the total money raised by Kickstarter for the year. Tabletop games are truly the engine that drives Kickstarter.

Because gamers are used to looking for new projects on Kickstarter, it has become a viable way for new designers to turn their dream into a reality. The gatekeeping of publishers and distributors no longer stand in the way of new games reaching fruition. Kickstarter allows individuals and publishers to go directly to the game-playing public.

This book is not about how to design a game, or how to test, iterate, and polish it. There are a number of terrific books that cover those topics, including *Building Blocks of Tabletop Game Design* (CRC Press, 2019) written by myself and Isaac Shalev, and Tracy Fullerton’s *Game Design Workshop* (CRC Press, 2018).

This book is about the physical craft of putting together a game. Board and card games are physical objects that must be manipulated by the players. Cards need to be laid out and printed. Fonts and colors need to be decided on. Rules need to be laid out. And the preparation of those objects throughout the design cycle can be daunting. New designers in particular often spend an inordinate amount of time on the physical preparation of prototypes and production samples, unaware of tricks and techniques that can dramatically streamline this process.

This book is in two major sections. The first covers general topics in prototyping and production, while the second goes through the life cycle of game development, and different techniques that are required for each stage

PART I: GENERAL TOPICS

Chapter 1: Tools of the Trade

This chapter covers the materials, physical tools, and software that is helpful to have available at all times, to allow you to rapidly get just about any design to a playable state.